

OVERCOMING WRITER'S BLOCK

Writing anxiety, commonly called "writer's block," is a form of anxiety or pessimism one feels towards a writing situation. It often results from the pressure a writer feels, either from themselves or their audience; because they are encountering a new writing experience; or previous negative experiences. The good news: writer's block can be overcome!

COMMON CAUSES OF WRITER'S BLOCK



- Facing an unfamiliar writing situation; for instance, the paper being longer than you are used to, or it uses a different format.
- Having a sense of perfectionism; some may be anxious about following the rules and not doing everything perfectly.
- Remembering criticism or negative feedback from previous readers.
- Not feeling like you know enough about the topic, or that you do not have anything important to say about it.
- Not having enough time, either due to short deadlines or procrastination.

ESTABLISH A SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Find a family member, friend, coach, instructor, or Writing Center Coach who can give you encouragement. You may even form a writing group.
- Talk about the struggles you have had, and your past successes. Show them some of your writing pieces. Talk about your ideas. Ask for constructive feedback.



TAKE A BREAK



- Step away from the assignment for a short time. Work on something else, do something that helps you relax, and come back to the assignment with a fresh outlook.
- However, do not wait until the last minute to work on your project. This can increase your writer's block and frustration.
- When you do work on your assignment, work in short increments of time. For example, write for 25 minutes at a time, then take a 5 minute break. Breaking an assignment into smaller steps can reduce the pressure of doing it all at once.

READ MORE ABOUT YOUR TOPIC

- If you do not feel like you know enough about your topic, spend a couple of hours researching current literature about it. Take notes about what you've read and highlight any key or interesting ideas you find. Evaluate how you might incorporate some of these ideas into your assignment.
- However, do not think that you need to read EVERYTHING about your topic before writing. You just need enough that you feel that you can write about it.



LEARN ABOUT THE WRITING SITUATION



- Sometimes it can be intimidating to encounter new forms of writing. So, view it as a learning situation and ask questions of people who are more experienced with this type of writing, or of the person who assigned it. Questions might include: What is the purpose? What are the most and least important elements to include? What is their writing process? How do they know when it's good enough?
- Look at different examples of this type of writing. Note what features you like or that feel more familiar to you, and how that writer conveyed their ideas. However, do NOT plagiarize from these examples! Use them as lessons on how to write your own paper!

TRY DIFFERENT BRAINSTORMING STRATEGIES

- Some common brainstorming strategies may include:
 - **Freewriting:** Writing nonstop about your topic for a short length of time without worrying about editing.
 - **Visuals:** These could include drawing a picture of your ideas, creating an outline to organize your ideas, clustering or webbing, or using another type of graphic organizer. Many examples can be found online.



ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS



- Think about a time you were able to write without being blocked. What was the writing environment like? Were you alone or with other people? Was their noise or was it quiet? What time of day was it? What distractions were there, if any? Try to recreate that environment as much as possible.
- If you can identify specific distractions, work to eliminate them. For instance, turn your phone off or silence it. Disconnect from social media or the internet. Find a quiet place to work, like the library. Wear earplugs or headphones to block out noise.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

- Mindfulness can help ground you in the present moment, calm your mind, and silence your inner critic, in only a short time.
- Some practices may include:
 - Closing your eyes and doing deep breathing exercises.
 - Scan your body and note areas of tension. Invite your body to relax. Unclench your jaw, let your hands rest in your lap, stretch your neck and back, etc. Yoga may also help.
 - Meditation or prayer. Ask God to give you a clear mind and focus. Give yourself positive affirmations about your writing. Remind yourself that you are up to the challenge. Picture your inner critic as an ugly monster and tell it to back off.
 - Reflective writing: Write about what's blocking you, or another issue that is bothering you. How can you overcome or work through this? If there is an external issue that is causing anxiety, perhaps find a counselor or mentor to talk to.
- Do any combination of these anytime you start feeling worried or frustrated about the writing situation.



BE KIND TO YOURSELF!



- Do not expect perfection. Remember that this is a process, and it takes time to write a good, polished paper. Even professional writers struggle and have to do a lot of revising before getting published.
- Allow yourself to write badly at first. Rough drafts are called "rough" for a reason - they aren't supposed to be good! Just get your ideas down on the paper without worrying about the quality of writing. Let your mind flow.
- After you've gotten everything down, then you can begin the revising and editing process. Do not beat yourself up over mistakes. Learn from them and use that learning experience to continually improve your writing. Also celebrate your successes and what you did correctly.

A FINAL REMINDER: YOU CAN DO THIS!

- While it may be intimidating at first, remind yourself that **YOU ARE CAPABLE OF DOING THIS!** Just like everything else - practicing your sport, learning to play an instrument, or learning another talent or subject, learning to write better takes time, hard work, and perseverance. Don't give up due to past negative experiences. Have confidence in yourself, use the sources available to you, and keep striving!

